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ABSTRACT

The School District of Philadelphia initiated a child abuse awareness workshop for all schools and school district personnel in April 1988. The objective of the sessions was to provide an increased awareness and sensitivity on the part of all school district employees to the issue of child abuse and its impact on the physical, emotional, and mental development of young people and of the role of school district personnel in addressing this problem. Approximately 70 percent of the school district's 253 schools returned questionnaires eliciting reactions to key issues addressed during the workshop, with a total of 8,628 employees' questionnaires analyzed. Results showed that: (1) the majority of respondents felt comfortable reporting cases of suspected child abuse; (2) the largest proportion of respondents who were not comfortable reporting child abuse indicated they were fearful of some form of retribution; (3) there was a need for increased staff development; and (4) respondents indicated they wanted to be informed if any action was taken on referrals. Several recommendations emerged from data analysis, including recommendations that follow-up staff development be provided; experts in prevention be involved to provide leadership; follow-up reports to those making referrals should be made; the role of parents and educators in child abuse prevention should be publicized; and the school district with other city agencies should distribute literature on child abuse to school personnel and parents. The individual respondent's questionnaire and the group recording forms are appended. (ABL)

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A SYSTEMWIDE EVALUATION OF A CHILD ABUSE POLICY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

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CG 021665

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A paper presented to the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California, March 27-31, 1989. The research and views expressed in this paper are the authors' own, and do not reflect the policy or position of the School District of Philadelphia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following summary represents the results of the School District of Philadelphia's Child Abuse Staff Development Initiative which occurred on April 14, 1988. Approximately 70% (178 schools) of the District's 253 schools returned questionnaires in a time frame that allowed for analysis of the data. Eight thousand six hundred twenty-eight (8628) School District employees' questionnaires were summarized. The School District personnel included teachers and non-teaching staff.

The analysis of the data suggests the following findings:

. The majority of respondents do feel comfortable reporting cases of suspected child abuse.

. The number of respondents who do not feel comfortable reporting suspected child abuse ranges, by school level, from 12% to 21%.

. The largest proportion of those individuals who do not feel comfortable reporting suspected child abuse indicated that they were "fearful of some form of retribution":

  a. Law suits

  b. Threat to personal safety

  c. Possible further child abuse

. A number of the respondents felt that more staff development was needed.

. Some respondents indicated that "they would have to be certain" before they could report suspected abuse.

. In response to the question on concerns in the area of child abuse detection and reporting, a majority of high school

respondents (64%) and an overwhelming majority of elementary (84%), middle (88%), and junior high (86%) school respondents indicated or asked questions which reflected a need for increased staff development.

. The survey respondents also indicated that they wished to be informed if any action is taken on referrals.

. The following recommendations emerge from the analysis of the data:

(1) Follow-up staff development is needed.

(2) The involvement of "experts" in the field of child abuse prevention to provide leadership in staff development sessions would be advisable.

(3) The School District and City Agencies should develop mechanisms or policy procedures that provide follow-up reports to those who make referrals.

(4) The School District should cooperate with other agencies and the media to publicize the role of educators and parents in child abuse prevention.

(5) The School District, in conjunction with other City Agencies, should periodically distribute literature on child abuse to school personnel and parents in an attempt to increase and maintain public awareness.

Introduction

Public school systems throughout urban America, and other segments of the country, are confronted with problems that have led to the call for educational reform. Reform initiatives have consistently targeted within school variables. However, there is a growing recognition of the schools' role in addressing out-of-school social problems (see, e.g., Brandt, editor, Educational Leadership, March, 1988).

Perhaps one of the most tragic problems that schools must address is child abuse and neglect. "It is difficult to define child abuse and neglect. No standard definition exists...Conceptually, Broadhurst (1978) defines an abused or neglected youth as 'a child whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by the acts or omissions of his parent or other person responsible for his welfare' " (McIntyre, 1986, p. 3).

The Carnegie Foundation's 1987 survey of 22,000 teachers nationwide illustrated that teachers view problems such as child abuse, poor health and poor nutrition among children in their classroom directly related to learning difficulties. The print media, along with television and radio talk shows are focusing attention on child abuse. It is a problem that must be both acknowledged and addressed by those in education.

The research literature on child abuse and its impact on student learning while "still in its infancy...directly points to or suggests that public schools can and should be more than just places where the 'basics' are taught; they must also be directly involved with identifying and remediating assorted problems, including child abuse, that seriously jeopardizes a child's opportunity to learn" (Sandberg, 1987).

This urban public school study has a two-fold purpose: (1) to document the focus of the literature on child abuse and neglect; (2) to examine a large school system's staff development initiative which served as a systemwide needs assessment that illustrated teachers' attitudes on reporting child abuse cases. As an outgrowth of the survey results, policy recommendations are presented which attempt to move the school district's staff development initiative from a "sensitizing" and "awareness" process to proactive plans.

The Literature on Child Abuse

The literature on child abuse and neglect can be categorized into the following thematic perspectives: (a.) recognition of the signs of abuse; (b.) child abuse prevention; (c.) in-service training for teachers related to reporting; and, (d.) teaching the abused child (see, e.g., Dennis-Small, 1986; Myers, et al., 1986).

The research literature is almost entirely without a focus on educators', specifically teachers' attitudes toward reporting cases of child abuse and neglect. However, the literature does consistently suggest that "teachers need to be provided with appropriate training...they need an efficient, delineated referral process..." (McIntyre, 1986).

Nearly every state in America has specific educational policies and practices regarding child abuse, and many school districts have policies on preventing and reporting child abuse cases (Education Commission of the States, 1976; Fead, 1985; Tower, 1987). The role of principals and teachers in reporting child abuse and neglect has been publicized as a requirement based on legal statues (Beezer, 1985; DHEW, 1985; Zirkeh & Gluckman, 1986). However, "research shows that educators are reluctant to report child abuse

and neglect because they are not sure what constitutes abuse and neglect, lack confidence that the report will be acted upon, and fear legal prosecution" (New York State Assembly Select Committee on Child Abuse, 1972). Craig, et al. (1987) suggest "studies show that many professionals selectively report cases of suspected child abuse".

While there are various models suggested for conducting in-service training for teachers (Hilbert & Morris, 1983; New York State Dept. of Education, 1985); the literature has not highlighted teachers' perceptions and attitudes on reporting. One contribution in this area is Turbett and O'Tocle (1983). The authors suggest that professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers' judgments may be shaped by "typifications". "Typifications contain notions of the 'types of people' or 'types of situations' that produce child abuse..." (p. 605).

The work of Turbett and O'Toole indicated that previous research found that physicians' judgments regarding child abuse were affected by socio-economic status (SES), race and level of injury. In contrast, nurses' judgments were affected by level of injury but not SES or race (p. 606). Teachers' attitudes on reporting based on the previously described variables were solicited using constructed vignettes.

In spite of noted limitations to the study, Turbett and O'Toole found that teachers were more like nurses than physicians when it came to reporting cases of child abuse. "Physicians' judgments of possible child abuse were affected by ethnic status and socio-economic status (of the family). Teachers' and nurses' judgments are not..." (p. 607).

In the survey results to be reported later, it was found that one reason teachers in a large urban public school system were reluctant to report child abuse was "fear of having to deal with irate or hostile

parents". Turbett and O'Toole present research in their study that identifies a similar rationale.

Levin (1983) surveyed teachers in one midwestern community to determine the awareness of their responsibility to report suspected child abuse/neglect, and the reason(s) why they often fail to detect and report it. The sample consisted of 209 elementary school teachers and 76 junior high school teachers in Iowa. The results indicated, "Only 4.3% marked 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the item, 'I feel it is not my place to become involved in whether or not a child has been abused'.

"Only 6.7% indicated 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the item, 'I think I may be physically harmed by angry parents...and only 19.1% responded 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the item 'I think I may be harassed if I report...' 36.9% 'agree' or 'strongly agree'...'I feel a child may suffer more abuse if I do report' " (pp. 17-18).

The survey results to follow illustrate similarities with the Levin findings. Levin also points out, "despite national data on the high incidence of child abuse (and teachers professed willingness to report), very few cases were actually reported by teachers..." (p. 19).

The survey results and evaluation to follow will focus on a large urban public school district's staff development initiative on child abuse, and it will highlight teachers' attitudes. This study concludes with policy recommendations that seek to facilitate the effective actions of teachers in addressing this critical problem that severely detracts from students' in-school success.

THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The School District of Philadelphia, under the auspices of the Superintendent of Schools, the Associate Superintendent for School Operations and a broad based committee composed of administration, and bargining units representatives, initiated a child abuse awareness workshop for all schools and School District personnel on April 14, 1988. The objective of the sessions was to provide an increased awareness and sensitivity on the part of all School District employees to the issue of child abuse and its impact on the physical, emotional and mental development of young people and of the role of School District personnel in addressing this problem.

Questionnaires were distributed to all participants eliciting their reactions to key issues addressed during the workshop (See Appendix A).

Approximately 70% (N=178) of the 253 schools in the system returned the questionnaires. Eight thousand six hundred twenty-eight (8628) School District employees' questionnaires were analyzed. The School District personnel included teachers and non-teaching staff.

The first part of this report presents an analysis of the data based on school organizational levels, i.e., elementary, middle, junior and senior high schools. It presents the findings of individual participants' reactions to the child abuse feedback questionnaire (see Appendix A).

The second part of this report presents a summarization of discussion group reactions to the workshop focus questions (see Appendix B). Discussion of the data and recommendations emanating from it are presented.

PART I: INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT REACTIONS

FINDINGS

- DO YOU NOW FEEL COMFORTABLE REPORTING CASES OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE?

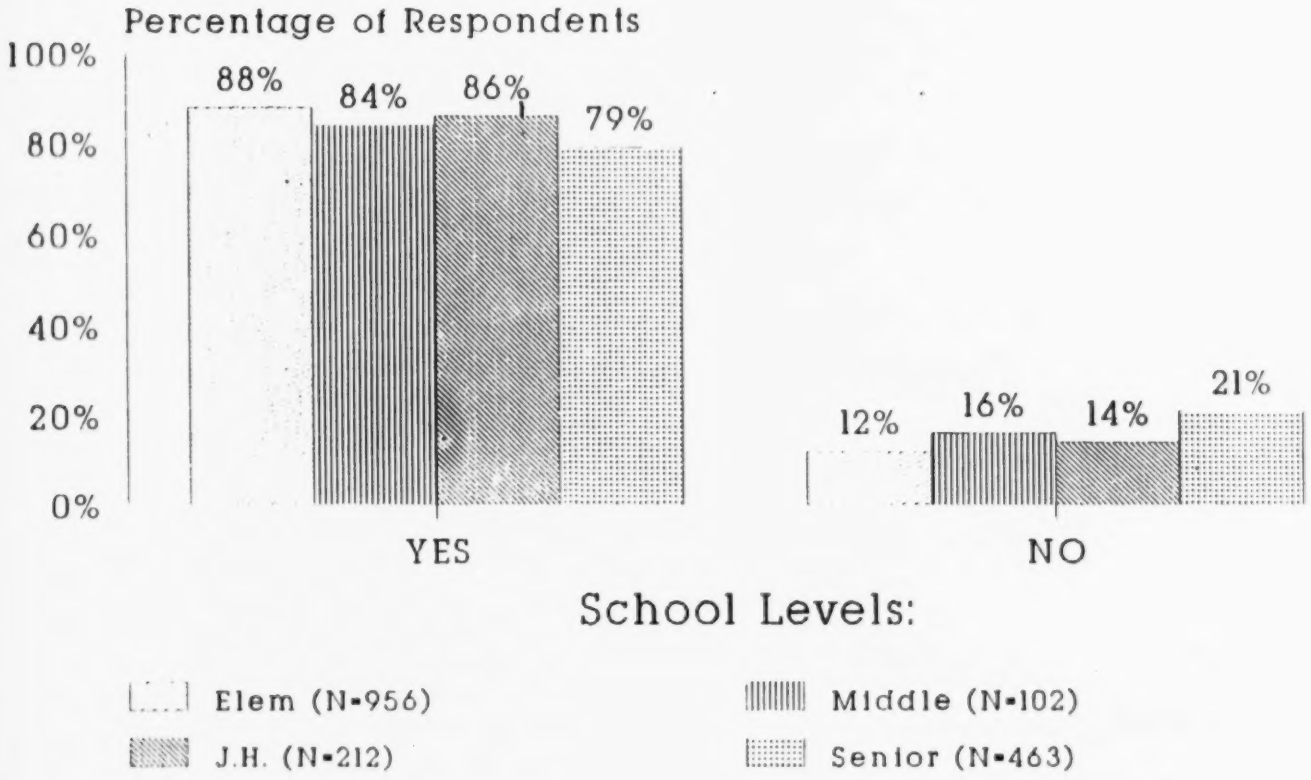
SCHOOL LEVEL	RESPONSES			
	YES		NO	
	#	%	#	%
Elementary	3956	88%	562	12%
Middle	766	84%	148	16%
Junior High	694	86%	115	14%
Senior High	1876	79%	511	21%
Total	7292	84.5%	1336	15.5%

The data summaries, above, and attached chart, Figure A., indicate that the majority of respondents reported that they do feel comfortable reporting cases of suspected child abuse. The "Yes" response column by school level ranges from 79% (Senior High) to 88% (Elementary).

The number of respondents who indicated, "No - I do not feel comfortable reporting cases of suspected child abuse," ranges from 12% (Elementary) to 21% (Senior High).

For the middle and junior high schools the "No" responses were 16% and 14%.

FIGURE A.
DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE REPORTING CASES OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE?



- IF RESPONDING NO, EXPLAIN WHAT MAKES YOU UNCOMFORTABLE.

The following categories were developed from the responses (See Figure B.):

	Elementary		Middle		JR High		SR High		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
. Fearful of Retribution	587	61%	35	34%	148	70%	173	37%	943	54%
. Need more Staff Development	165	17%	28	27%	19	9%	135	29%	347	20%
. Would have to be Certain	109	11%	11	12%	21	10%	78	17%	219	13%
. Not the Teacher's Role	16	3%	3	2%	2	1%	24	6%	45	3%
. Not explained (No response)	79	8%	25	25%	22	10%	53	11%	179	10%

N = 1733

The majority of respondents, to the above question, at the elementary (61%) and junior high (70%) school levels indicated they were not comfortable reporting cases of suspected child abuse, because they were "fearful of retribution."

At the senior high (37%) and middle school (34%) levels, the plurality of the respondents to the question indicated that they were "fearful of retribution" if a suspected case of child abuse were to be reported.

Such fears included concerns related to personal safety, further possible child abuse, and legal actions against school personnel:

. "I am afraid that parents will know the teacher reported the case."

. "I am afraid the School District will not give me support after I have reported the case."

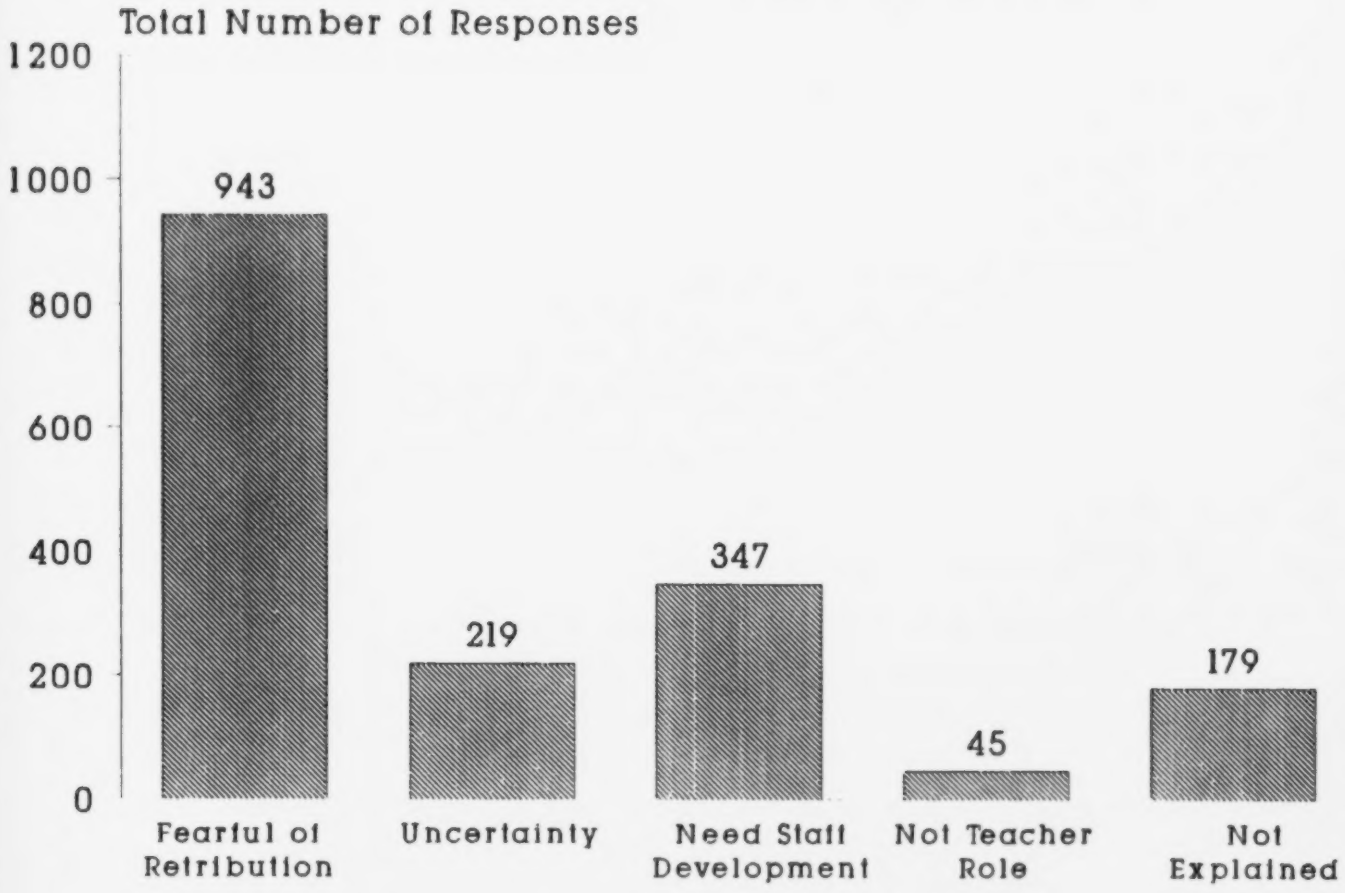
. "Parents will punish the child if they find out abuse has been reported."

. "Parents may try physical abuse against me when they find out abuse has been reported by the teacher."

. "I am fearful of parents concerning a possible law suit if I report abuse."

FIGURE B.

WHAT MAKES YOU UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT REPORTING CHILD ABUSE?



The following statements and questions indicated a need for more staff development if suspected cases of child abuse were to be reported:

. "I should respect the personal space of others and not look for abuse."

. "I am not sure anything will be done about reported abuse."

. "Reporting child abuse could damage the relationship between the teacher and the child."

. "How does the teacher separate abuse from neglect?"

Some respondents indicated that they "would have to be certain" before reporting suspected cases of child abuse.

. "I do not have the training to recognize abuse."

. "I have a lack of experience in reporting abuse."

. "How do I recognize if the child is lying about abuse?"

The data summaries, above, indicate that a number of respondents did not explain their "No" response. Also, a few respondents suggested that reporting suspected cases of child abuse "is not the teacher's role".

- LIST QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS IN THE AREAS OF CHILD ABUSE DETECTION OR REPORTING.

The following broad categories were developed from the responses, and will be elaborated on in the discussion section of this report.

	Elementary		Middle		JR High		SR High	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
More Staff Development	743	84%	136	88%	112	86%	296	64%
Need for Follow-up	144	16%	19	12%	18	14%	165	36%

At the elementary, middle and junior high school levels, the overwhelming majority of respondents to the above question identified staff development, or asked questions that would require additional staff development in the area of child abuse detection or reporting.

A majority of high school respondents (64%) to the above question identified staff development; in addition, 36% raised concerns related to follow-up in the detection or reporting of child abuse.

The concerns and questions raised by respondents to the above question indicated that follow-up and more staff development were important issues. Follow-up entailed City Agencies successfully performing their responsibilities, inclusive of reporting the disposition of all suspected cases that are referred by school personnel. Additionally, respondents raised concerns that follow-up by school principals must occur. This would entail principals acting on referrals as well as providing feedback to teachers.

Follow-up staff development sessions were also identified. A range of staff development issues and questions to be addressed were raised by respondents:

- "I worry about reporting child abuse if it is told to me in confidence."
- "Why is it mandatory that the teacher report child abuse?"
- "I am concerned about my safety once I report abuse."
- "Am I the one who must contact the parent and Department of Human Services (DHS) about suspected abuse?"
- "Do I have to notify the student that abuse has been reported?"

PART II: DISCUSSION OF GROUP REACTIONS

As part of the Child Abuse Prevention Workshop, participants were given a list of focus questions to review by way of a formal reporting process (see attached focus questions, Appendix B). Three to five summary sheets were received from each of the one hundred and seventy (170) schools responding in a time frame allowing inclusion in the analysis.

The workshop focus questions included the following general categories:

(1) The school's role in the prevention of child abuse;

(2) How schools can reduce child maltreatment;

(3) Recommendations for prevention education programs in support of parents and children;

(4) The school system's role in addressing obstacles related to reporting and staff involvement;

(5) Recommendations for meeting mandated obligations under the law;

(6) The effects of internal and external factors on child abuse reporting;

(7) Schools' implementation of planned child abuse prevention programs;

(8) Suggested action programs (school-based, school - community, and individual) needed to improve services to families and school staff;

(9) Recommendations for teaching K-12 course of study: Preventing Sexual Abuse (Plummer, author);

(10) A prioritized list of items to address related to child abuse.

An analysis of the reporting forms yielded four categories or themes into which the responses to the above focus questions fell:

(1) Educating and sensitizing students

(2) Reaching out to the home

(3) Reaching out to the community

(4) Preparing teachers

EDUCATING AND SENSITIZING STUDENTS

- The School District should have seminars for students handled by experts (psychologists).
- The School District should put books in libraries to cover the issue of abuse - books should be in English and Spanish.
- Programs provided by the School District for children (students) to attend - they can learn how to protect themselves.
- Develop programs on drugs since often drugs will lead to child abuse.
- Address the self-concept of the student, schools should develop a program that will provide for positive self-worth.
- Dramatic production - role playing in assemblies so that students will recognize child abuse.
- Make students aware that mental abuse is just as damaging as other forms of abuse.
- Sensitize children that there are people in school who can help.
- Each school should have an assembly program to explain "support" for abused children.
- Use the hygiene class to explain child abuse.
- Incorporate child abuse prevention throughout the entire curriculum. Study it in all grades and in all subjects.
- Have students participate in discussion groups.
- Have writing activities in class where students can write about child abuse.

REACHING OUT TO THE HOME

- Focus on young parents by way of continued parent workshops.
- The School District should send letters to parents describing child abuse prevention programs.
- The School District should tape T.V. specials (Channel 12 or Cable) for children and parents to watch after the school day which can be analyzed and discussed by parent and child.
- Make sure that parents know that teachers are legally bound to report suspected child abuse.
- Provide information handbook to parents concerning child abuse.
- Have an "ideal" parent come to the school to meet with other parents to show how parenting should be done.
- Use school newsletter to publicize child abuse prevention programs at the school to be sent to parents.
- The role of the school in child abuse cases should be talked about with the parents early, and in every school year.
- The School District could provide workshops for parents at the District level so that parents recognize the signs of child abuse.
- Have seminars on child abuse during the school day where parents could be present.
- Need for the School District to educate young fathers about child abuse as well as young mothers.
- Set up situations that allow parents to refer themselves to the school with regard to child abuse.

REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

- The School District should coordinate its child abuse prevention education efforts with neighborhoods.
- Form a School District community task force to provide for increased awareness of child abuse.
- Use the Home and School Association in each school to help solve problems of child abuse.
- The School District should establish a "hot line" for child abuse.
- The Community Home and School Coordinator should be brought back to all schools to assist in working with parents and the school when child abuse is reported.
- Need for the School District, parents and the community to work together on issues of child abuse.

PREPARING TEACHERS

- Continued workshops for teachers are necessary.
- The School District should hire more people (experts) to deal with this problem of prevention.
- The School District efforts should be most intensive in the elementary schools.
- The School District should reduce class size so that the teacher can get to know the students better to pick-up problems of child abuse.
- The School District needs a "form" to follow abused children from one school to another.
- The School District needs to fund child abuse programs properly at the school level - tapes, experts, etc.
- The reporter should receive feedback from the Department of Human Services.
- Reporting mechanism should be clearly stated to all staff.
- Teachers need staff development in order to better recognize child abuse.
- The entire school staff should be aware of the children who have been identified as abused and work with counselor and school nurse.
- Staff needs to be taught how to recognize signs of suspected cases of sexual abuse; teach students how to recognize sexual abuse against them.
- The School District should hold one or two special days per year to deal with issues of child abuse.
- Form a committee within the school to specifically address this issue of child abuse.
- Let other teachers in the school know who is being abused.

. Teachers need to be certain about abuse because of law suits by parents.
. Teachers should be given a handbook that clearly delineates the reporting process.
. Need to distinguish between "child abuse" and other problems.
. Fear for the child once the abuse has been reported and the parent informed should be addressed.
. Every effort must be made to follow-up with the school.
. Teachers are not trained in the area of looking for child abuse; how can we recognize mental abuse?
. Teachers are interested in having their reporting stop after the counselor and/or principal are notified.
. Use a training film with teachers to help them deal with prevention of child abuse.

The above comments represent the views of School District personnel who participated in the April 14, 1988 Child Abuse Workshops. The feedback statements represent a response to all but two of the focus questions.

The two focus questions which were not addressed on the feedback forms were: (1) the effects of internal and external factors in child abuse reporting; and, (2) a prioritized list of items to address related to child abuse.

DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The data analysis and group workshop summary sheets indicate that there is a discrepancy in the child abuse materials reviewed by school personnel. One booklet indicates, or gives the impression, that teachers report child abuse. However, the policy is that principals report child abuse (refer to Policy Statement 504). This policy statement provides that teachers report child abuse cases to the school principal. Teachers remain anonymous, and the principal is responsible for further reporting and documentation.

Many of the issues and questions raised on the questionnaire indicated that teachers do not clearly understand the policy. Therefore, additional staff development is indicated:

(1) There is a need for follow-up staff development at each school level to clarify the policy; specifically, the role of the principal, teacher and other school district personnel.

(2) There is a need for sessions to be held to allow school personnel to express their concerns, and receive responses from "experts" in the field.

(3) There is a need for the School District, and City Agencies to develop mechanisms or policy procedures that will allow those reporting suspected cases of child abuse to receive information on all referrals. Naturally this will have to be accomplished in a manner consistent with legal confidentiality requirements.

The responses to the child abuse questionnaire illustrate the advisability of increased parent awareness of child abuse and of the school's role in prevention:

(4) There is a need for the School District, along with other agencies

and the media, to publicize the issue of child abuse and to emphasize both educators' and parents' responsibilities in child abuse prevention.

(5) There is a need for the School District, working in conjunction with other City Agencies, periodically to distribute literature on child abuse to school personnel and parents in an attempt to increase and maintain public awareness.

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APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

THIS PAGE IS TO BE COLLECTED

Please check one:

Elementary _____
Middle _____
Junior H. _____
Senior H. _____

_____
Grade or Subject Taught

1. Do you now feel comfortable reporting cases of suspected child abuse?

Yes_____ No_____

If your answer was no, please explain what makes you uncomfortable.

2. If you have any questions or concerns in the areas of child abuse detection or reporting, please record them below. (use back of sheet if necessary.)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

APPENDIX B: GROUP RECORDING FORM

NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH
APRIL 14, 1988

"The School District's Role in the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect"

Group Facilitator

The group facilitator guides the forum for idea exchanges. When meeting with a small group to discuss an issue, it is helpful to have in mind the type of questions to ask to open up discussion and broaden participation. Remember not to act as a subject expert or to expect literal answers.

Focus Questions

The involvement of School District personnel in the reporting of child abuse and neglect is supported by Federal standards and regulations, State laws, and local policies and procedures. We have learned that in order to effectively protect children from injury and abuse, we must:

- Locate and report cases of child abuse

and

- Extend services to parents and children who need help

1. What do you think the school's role should be, in aiding the community effort, to prevent child abuse and neglect. After the reporting, how can schools become actively involved in programs to reduce the incidence of child maltreatment.

2. The major goal of prevention is to stop child abuse and neglect from occurring at all. Do you have suggestions, or recommendations that would assist other school district personnel in planning prevention education programs which are supportive of parents and children.

3. How can the school system address obstacles related to the reporting process and ensure continued involvement by staff. Do you have questions regarding your role as a mandated reporter. Discuss the effects of internal and external factors; and offer recommendations to support meeting our mandated obligations under the law.

4. How does your school presently implement a planned child abuse prevention program. What other school-based, school-community, and individual action programs are needed to improve services to families and staff?

5. Teaching the Child Sexual Abuse Curriculum is a mandated unit under the Mental Health Strand of the Health Education course of study, Do you have recommendation or suggestions, to assist other school district staff, in teaching the K-12 Course of Study Preventing Sexual Abuse, author, Carol A. Plummer.

NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH
APRIL 14, 1988

THE GROUP RECORDER

1. Record issues and concerns as specifically as possible. Record recommendations offered by the participant.

2. Request clarification if the meaning of the speaker is not clear to you. Make sure the issue is specific and the recommendation, if there is one, is understandable.

3. Please list additional information on training that teachers feel they need to be effective.

4. Prioritize the list by placing the number 1 next to the idea needing the greatest attention, number 2 next to the item needing the next most attention, and so on, until all items are ranked.

5. Submit the group recording form to the facilitator at the end of the day.

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA
NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH
APRIL 14, 1988

Recording Form

Topic: "The School District's Role in the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect"

ISSUE: Be specific and assign priority.	NATURE OF ISSUE: Description	RECOMMENDATIONS: Be specific and assign priority.

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